

After the Pogrom

So the Netherlands has become a haven for fervent progressive politics, I once thought.
What's that compared to Nazis? This week we have our answer.

By Kathleen Hayes

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In cities throughout the Netherlands, you can't walk far without coming across a *Stolperstein*, or "stumbling stone": a small brass plaque in the sidewalk commemorating a Jewish victim of the Nazi regime. The plaques are intended to jolt passersby into pained remembrance. "*Hier woonde*," the plaque reads—here lived—a person with this name, born on this date, arrested or deported on this date or year, held prisoner in this place. The plaque concludes in one of three ways: "*vermoord*" (murdered), "*bevrijd*" (liberated) or "*overleefd*" (survived). In the Netherlands, the memory of the Holocaust is kept perpetually alive.

Nowhere is this so apparent as in Amsterdam. The Anne Frank House is one of the city's top tourist attractions, a must-visit location for millennials to shoot smiling selfies of themselves where the murdered Jewish teenager and her family once lived. There's a National Holocaust Names Memorial, where the 102,000 Jewish (and 220 Roma and Sinti) victims are commemorated; a memorial at the former site of the Westerbork deportation center; and an Auschwitz monument. There's also a new (opened in March 2024) National Holocaust Museum, where visitors are urged to "immerse yourself in the history of the persecution of the Jews." Although it says a lot that on the day of the museum's inauguration, protesters outraged by the attendance of Israeli President Isaac Herzog amassed against it. As Dara Horn might say, ubiquitous remembrance of dead Jews did nothing to make them pause about targeting living ones.

My then three-year-old mother and her parents fled the Netherlands in 1940 because it had become perilous to be a Jew. In the many years before her death, my grandmother refused to return to her homeland even for a visit—not, Oma suggested, because her memories of the German occupation were too painful, but because her country had been "ruined by socialism." I always found this strange, and amusingly, rigidly conservative. So the Netherlands has become a haven for pot shops, legalized prostitution and fervent progressive politics, I thought. What's that compared to Nazis?

This week we have our answer. The oh-so-tolerant, liberal Dutch hosted a pogrom, and one of the most horrifying aspects of it is its predictability. The signs have been there for decades: in the 2004 murder of director Theo van Gogh, stabbed by a jihadist in the

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Dutch parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali, for speaking out about the dangers to the West and particularly women by radical Islam. The huge numbers of unassimilated immigrants from Muslim majority countries. The well-intended pursuit of an integrated police force, the result of which is that, according to Hirsi Ali, a large part of the police force in Amsterdam is comprised of second-generation immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East. Before this week, some officers had already refused to guard Jewish locations such as the Holocaust Museum, citing “moral dilemmas.” The Netherlands now contains about 30,000 Jews, 1.17 million Muslims, and a liberal consensus that anyone concerned about these demographics, given the obvious failures of multiculturalism, is a hateful Islamophobe.

It's in this context that this week's pogrom against Israeli soccer fans took place. The attack was premeditated, advertised on social media, and known to Dutch authorities, but the police did almost nothing to stop it. The Holocaust was a long time ago, is the prevailing message. Jews no longer deserve sympathy or protection.

Not long ago, shattered by Brexit and the 2016 election of Donald Trump, I marched in London demonstrations under the magnanimous-sounding slogan “Refugees Welcome Here.” It was hard coming to terms with the thought that the supposedly right-wing critics of mass immigration—people like Hirsi Ali, and Douglas Murray—were right. But the evidence is all around us, including in Amsterdam.

The West has the right and duty to protect itself, its heritage and people from those screaming their intent to destroy it. This doesn't mean shutting the door to all immigration, maligning all Muslims, or responding callously to people from poor, strife-filled countries. It does mean recognizing that naivety about the world comes at a heavy cost, and it isn't paid by the largely white, affluent, progressive Dutch establishment, or the righteous-minded Londoners I once marched with. Their feel-good allegiance to multiculturalism and unlimited migration comes at the expense of *other* people, people not regarded as sufficiently oppressed—like women, who experience a much higher incidence of sexual harassment and assault in the new Europe, and Jews.

Which brings us to Trump's second election. The American people have spoken out not for hate, but against it: against the relentless identity politics that only sows divisiveness. Against the university presidents who only find their commitment to free speech when it lets terrorist sympathizers call for the genocide of Jews. Against the hounding of women who don't think men (“transwomen”) belong in women's sports or women's prisons. Against the virtual non-existence of our southern border, and the obvious lies about it.

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Against the canceling of political heretics, almost invariably deemed to be on the political right. Against lawlessness. Against the persecution of parents concerned about the effects of puberty blockers, hormones and surgeries for “transgender” children, and the nonsensical gender ideology their children are learning in the classroom. Against government-imposed censorship and the threat of more in the name of “stopping misinformation.” Against lawfare, the blatant prosecution of political enemies. Against an elitist sanctimonious establishment in which hard-working Americans worried about the future of themselves, their children and their country are called “garbage.”

Rejecting these things is not incipient fascism. To those of you who feel that it is, or who are depressed and scared about what Trump’s election means, I write as one who has been there.

We live in fragmented times, in which our sense of identity, purpose and belonging comes largely from our political tribe. Denouncing and jeering at our political enemies gives us a sense of solidarity and righteousness that warms a cold and lonely world. It’s like being among family—not the acrimonious relationship you might have with your blood relatives, but in the most felicitous sense of the term. This makes it extremely hard to see when your family goes wrong.

And yet the majority of the American people—including many who consider themselves on the political left—say that it has. So try listening to what they say—to their clear statements that they have acted not for tyranny, but against it. I don’t know about Amsterdam, but if we in America can listen better, we’re going to be okay.

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